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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the current status of and need for acceptable use policies (AUPs) for students' use of the Internet in Alabama school systems. Alabama superintendents were questioned using an electronic survey that could be returned via e-mail on an anonymous Internet site. Primary questions were: (1) What is your level of concern about students' proper use of the Internet? (2) Is there really a necessity for schools to have an AUP concerning accessing the Internet? (3) What do you believe are the crucial elements of an AUP for students' use of the Internet? (4) What was the nature of the incident your system experienced related to student use of the Internet in the past years? and (5) What is the best way to make sure that students use the Internet properly in school other than having an AUP? Results suggest that there is a great need for Internet use policies in Alabama. While the students in a majority of school systems use the Internet, a minority of the systems have adequate AUPs. Appendices include the questionnaire, cover letter, a sample AUP, and a list of Internet sites about AUPs. (Contains 22 references.) (MES)

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Internet Acceptable User Policies in Alabama School Systems

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Abstract

During the past two decades, computer and information technology have become a dominant world force, moving economies and creating knowledge at an unprecedented pace. Today, the Internet has become one of the most important technological revolutions, influencing many sectors of society including education, and is being used increasingly to complement and supplement traditional modes of instruction. The Internet can add positive value to the learning process, helping both teachers and students improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching-learning process by motivating students to self-discovery and developing reasoning skills. At the same time, many concerns have been expressed about students' proper use of the Internet and the value it adds to education. Many school districts are seeing complications of students' surfing in uncharted waters. In order to protect students and avoid repeating past mistakes that accompanied the introduction of this technology into education, educators need to take action to meet this challenge. The purpose of this study was to determine the current status and need of acceptable use policies for students' use of the Internet in Alabama school systems.

The study used an electronic survey that could be returned via e-mail on an anonymous Internet web site. The data were analyzed using SPSS, and descriptive statistics were reported.

The results suggest that there is a great need for Internet use policies in Alabama. While the students in a majority of school systems use the Internet, a minority of the systems have adequate Internet use policies. The results have implications for all schools or systems where students use the Internet.

Internet Acceptable User Policies in Alabama School Systems

Introduction

During the past two decades, computer and information technology have become a dominant world force, moving economies and creating knowledge at an unprecedented pace. Today, the Internet is one of the most important technological revolutions, influencing many sectors of society including education (Rinaldi, 1996). In addition to delivering distance education, the Internet is being used increasingly to complement and supplement traditional modes of instruction. Used appropriately, the Internet can add positive value to the learning process. As Gay (1997) described, Internet use in school helps both teachers and students improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching-learning process and motivates students to self-discovery, developing reasoning skills that will be essential in the 21st century. Furthermore, the Internet provides new ways of approaching current educational methodologies, such as constructivism and cooperative learning, in which students learn best when they are actively engaged in constructing their own knowledge through social and cognitive activities to enhance their higher order thinking. It automates a process of gathering and communicating information for the development of knowledge and skills (Wolf, 1995, Gokhale, 1996). With the increased use of the Internet by schools, school administrations are struggling with appropriate policies.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current status and the need or lack of need for Internet acceptable use policies (AUPs) in Alabama school systems. A secondary purpose of this study was to demonstrate the use of a web-based survey method. First, the current literature was reviewed, extracting pertinent information relating to AUPs. Then, Alabama superintendents were surveyed, with the primary questions being:

1. What is your level of concern about students' proper use of the Internet?

2. Is there really a necessity for schools to have an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) concerning accessing the Internet?
3. What do you believe are the crucial elements of an acceptable use policy (AUP) for students' use of the Internet?
4. What was the nature of the incident your system experienced related to student use of the Internet in the past years?
5. What is the best way to make sure that students use the Internet properly in school other than having an AUP?

These questions were examined and reviewed relative to school administrators, teachers and students. Results will provide guidelines for school administrators for the development and modification of their own Internet AUPs.

Review of Related Literature

An initiative to connect to the Internet is irreversible. Teachers, school administration officials, and officials at various levels of government are involved in the move to the Internet (Hall, 1997). However, there are concerns that students' use of the Internet will not realize its potential value for education. Guglielmo (1995) urged educators to avoid repeating some of the mistakes that accompanied the introduction of other technologies such as educational television, VCRs, laser discs, etc. into education by preparing adequately for the Internet and its potential for accessing distributed information or interpersonal communication. The possibility of it becoming an effective educational resource is dependent on the adoption of the most suitable approach to the application of this information highway in order to produce "added value" for education. In order to protect our children from Internet dangers and to avoid repeating past mistakes, it will be necessary for us as educators to take appropriate actions to meet this challenge. One of these actions suggested by Sun and McLean (1999, April) is an appropriate Internet AUP.

Internet Usage

Internet usage in schools is growing at a phenomenal rate. Statistics released in a report by the National Center for Education Statistics for the U.S. Department of Education (1997) revealed that 65% of US public schools had access to the Internet in fall, 1996. Sixty-one percent of all public elementary schools had Internet access, and about seventy-five percent of secondary schools had Internet access. Eighty-seven percent of public schools that did not have access to the Internet had plans to obtain access by the year 2000.

School districts across the U.S. are realizing the educational value of the Internet and are installing it in schools to provide their students with the advantages it provides. However, many school districts are also seeing the complications of students' surfing in uncharted waters. While most of the sites have the potential for educational use, a small percentage can be objectionable due to racial, sexist, political, sexual, or other content. This is the darker side of the Internet. These sites have received much publicity from both print and television media, which has left the impression among Internet rookies that the Internet is nothing but a collection of smut (Hundt, 1996).

As Trentin (1996) described, thousands of educators worldwide have discovered that bringing the Internet into the classroom promotes educational excellence and breathes new life and excitement into the educational experience. However, teachers and parents are becoming increasingly concerned about the appropriateness of some of the material available to students online and how Internet connections are actually being used in schools. These concerns are understandable, as providing students with access to a vast amount of unfiltered information and the ability to communicate with people throughout the world necessarily raises concerns that students will be exposed to ideas or material that may be unhealthy or non-educational. Carpenter (1997) stated that concerns by educators and researchers over Internet use by students include personal use infractions, network contamination and abuse, and issues regarding actual educational value. These

concerns are valid when determining the value technology adds to education in terms of knowledge compared to dollars spent.

Monitoring Internet Usage

Many people do not understand that the Internet is an international linking of networks that is almost impossible to censor. Bret (1996) indicated that this information highway gives students and educators at all levels the ability to instantly create elaborate visual models of the world around them and watch the way its elements interact, without the limitations of time and space.

One of the tools used to limit access to sites is filtering or blocking software. However, almost any student with the initiative, given the time and the initiative, can learn to circumvent such software and find objectionable sites. In addition, software that blocks access to objectionable information can also limit educationally legitimate sites. Cisler (1997) points out that another way of controlling content is to limit access to certain categories of Internet services, such as newsgroups or electronic mail. However, if this course of action is pursued, students lose access to the educational benefits of these services. Another method of controlling access is to teach students responsible behavior and allow them access in degrees based on this behavior (Zwier, 1998). This approach appears to be wise because it assists students in developing a sense of responsibility.

Measures can and should be taken to help keep inappropriate material out of the school setting. Hardware and software controls are often used to limit student and faculty access to certain Internet resources, such as specific Usenet newsgroups. Dyrli (1996) found that, sometimes, the computers themselves are made unavailable except by appointment. When they are used, they are used under strict supervision in some public schools. Yet, there is no guarantee that users will not find a way to access inappropriate material or misuse their time on the Internet.

Internet Myths and Reality

There is much confusion and misunderstanding regarding access to the Internet among our teachers and students. Weir (1998) listed several common myths about the Internet.

Myth 1. The Internet is private, and user activities are not known to anyone else.

Reality: The Internet is NOT private and user activities can be known to a great many people. For example, every user account located on an Internet computer is managed by one or more people who have access to everything on the server. Some organizations make every effort to protect the privacy of electronic mail, and some do not. Every time a user accesses a world-wide-web (or gopher, or FTP) site, however, it can be observed, and information about the activity can be recorded or logged on the browser software called "cookies". In addition, much of the Internet is based on the UNIX operating system, which provides all users with certain tools (such as "who" and "finger") which allow them to obtain information about users and online activities. Also, many hackers can intercept and read Internet transactions when they are not encrypted (Carr, 1998).

Myth 2: A user can access the Internet for any purpose whatsoever.

Reality: An Internet Acceptable Use Policy and User Agreement attempts to restrict Internet access to activities related to teaching and schoolwork. Every user has signed such an agreement and is bound by it. If users have private, personal, family, or commercial needs for Internet access and world-wide-web services, then they should obtain an account from an Internet Service Provider such as AOL, MCI, etc.

Myth 3: It is OK to allow other teachers on the school network to use my account.

Reality: It is NOT OK! Allowing anyone else, including other teachers, to use your account violates the agreement you signed with the school and contravenes the Internet Acceptable Use Policy. This is the case regardless of the purpose for which the other teacher is using your account.

Myth 4: My friend or son or daughter is very responsible and would never do anything improper on the Internet.

Reality: Most of the Internet security problems have come from teachers or other users allowing their own children and friends to have access to their password and account. This contravenes the Acceptable Use Policy and signed Agreement. It also results in the immediate suspension of access privileges when detected. In many cases, we have observed some very irresponsible and very improper activities by these friends, and children, with both moral and legal consequences.

Myth 5: All Internet users who are friendly and helpful can be trusted.

Reality: Many can be trusted, but not all. A friend, colleague or student may appear to be helpful, but could use your account for his or her own purposes, compromising your integrity. For instance, Zwier (1998) noted that many Internet Relay Chat (IRC) sites have the ability to collect your user name and password. Many users make the mistake of entering their private user passwords when signing onto IRC sites, and thus can make their passwords known to the IRC site manager and others.

Myth 6: Access from schools is safe for students.

Reality: While the Internet contains a great deal that is good and of value to students, there are also many pornographic, racist, sexist, and violent sites that are not safe for access by children. Although legal and technological advances will make the Internet safer, it will not be child-proof for a long time (Carr, 1998). For example, products such as "Net Shepherd" and "Net

> Nanny" provide some, but not complete protection, and in some cases, it gives teachers and parents a false sense of security. The best protection is vigilance and supervision by teachers and parents. To increase parent, teacher, and student awareness of these issues, each school that provides student access should develop, perhaps with the assistance of the District Office, a School-Internet Acceptable Use Policy (Cisler, 1997).

Development and Content of Acceptable Use Policies

In order to protect the school and reassure parents, Hanson (1997) proposed that administrators and technology coordinators of school districts should create and implement an Acceptable User Policy (AUP). An AUP is a written agreement, signed by students, their parents, and teachers, outlining the terms and conditions for their use of the Internet. It specifically sets out acceptable uses, rules of online behavior, and access privileges. Also covered are penalties for violations of the policy, including security violations and vandalism of the system. Anyone using a school's Internet connection should be required to sign an AUP, and know that it will be kept on file as a legal, binding document (Cisler, 1997).

For years, teachers and administrators have been the "gatekeepers" of information flow in education through curriculum development and implementation. Today, new technologies are redefining who has control of information flow. By allowing students' access to the Internet in an educational setting, administrators and teachers are no longer the gatekeepers. The challenge for these policy makers lies in their ability to synthesize technology and methodology to achieve educational objectives (Fishman, 1997).

In 1997, Steve noted that many school districts have taken proactive steps to address the synthesis of technology and methodology through the development of an Internet AUP. This action is a necessary step in defining rights, responsibilities and privileges of students, parents, administrators and teachers involving Internet use in the schools. An Internet AUP provides, in some situations, legal guidelines that lessen the

chance of conflicts. A recent study about Internet AUPs, completed by McPherson in 1997 in Pennsylvania, showed that 35% of school districts indicated that no Internet AUP was developed for their school district, 52% of school districts indicated their need in developing the AUP for their school districts, and only 13% of school districts said that an Internet AUP was developed for their school district. While this study does not represent a sampling of school districts nationwide, it may be an indication of what is occurring in other states as school districts come to terms with this emerging technology.

The data obtained by McPherson (1997) suggests that in the development of an Internet AUP, the following components should be included:

1. Privilege. The use of the Internet by a student in school is a privilege, and not a right, that can be suspended if unacceptable behavior occurs. The school reserves the right to make all final decisions on what is considered inappropriate use of the Internet within the school classrooms or labs.
2. Etiquette. Most students bring little experience in Internet usage to the classroom, so rules of etiquette should address
    a). appropriate language;
    b). politeness; and
    c). privacy.
3. Security. A lost or stolen password, trying to access another individual's account, or destroy the data of another are all security breaches.
4. Vandalism. Any malicious attempt to create, upload, or download any computer virus; deliberate and willful acts to damage equipment or software; delete nonpersonal files, to hack, or any attempt to break into another system constitutes vandalism.
5. Legal issues. Violation of copyright laws, stealing of data or access codes, defamation and privacy have legal consequences.
6. Warranties. Schools should not be held accountable for the loss of data,

service interruptions, misdeliveries, nondeliveries, or the accuracy or quality of information obtained.

Ultimately, parents and guardians of minors are responsible for setting and conveying the standards that their children should follow when using media and information sources over the Net. To that end, only through the development of an AUP will school districts freely utilize the educational value of the Internet, avoiding legal and moral complications.

Method

This study was based on a descriptive survey of Alabama school system superintendents. The survey instrument had 12 quantitative items and one open response item about Internet acceptable use policies (AUPs). The survey population was superintendents of all county and city school systems in Alabama or their designated representatives (n=128). One hundred twenty-three superintendents' e-mail addresses were retrieved from the public web page of the Alabama State Department of Education (http://157.149.1.31/Superintendent/default.asp).

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a survey, which was set up on an Internet site. The 123 superintendents or their designated representatives were requested to respond to the survey on the Internet site via e-mail. Compared with other data collection, this method is cost-effective and time-efficient. It can provide information about the present implementation and status of Internet acceptable use policies at each school system. It can also be used to set benchmarks and determine the amount of change at different points in time. The survey consists of 13 questions based on the following six concepts:

1. Current access to the Internet by students and teachers including their demographic information,
2. Level of concern about students' proper use of the Internet,
3. Incidents that systems have experienced in the past related to Internet usage,
4. Degree of comfort concerning students' surfing the Internet without a binding AUP,
5. The best ways school systems ensured students used the Internet properly other than having an AUP, and
6. An open-ended question regarding the need or lack of need for an Internet acceptable use policy (AUP).

The survey items were based on the review of the literature. The survey has 13 items in multiple-choice, skip pattern, and short answer formats requesting information about the above six areas. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

Data Collection

The survey was constructed using HTML and published in a dedicated website (http://www.ed.uab.edu/edt300sun/survey.htm). This method allowed the survey population of superintendents to respond online in less than five minutes. This web site was hosted on one of the secure servers of the UAB School of Education. Respondents could complete the survey anonymously. No identifier could be traced back to the survey participants since there was not a password or login ID required to access the survey. Each Superintendent was contacted via e-mail. The e-mail message stated the purpose, the need, and the survey website address (see Appendix B) and requested that the superintendent or his or her designee respond. The directions and contact information for questions about the survey were on the survey itself (see Appendix A). In most cases,

respondents could double click on the website address in the e-mail and go directly to the Internet survey. After one week, a second e-mail message was sent to each superintendent reminding him or her of the survey request (Appendix B). The instrument was pilot tested and reviewed by a technology faculty member before distribution. After each superintendent or designated representative completed the survey online, he or she than clicked the "Submit" button, and an e-mail containing the responses was forwarded to the researcher through the server e-mailer cgi-bin function. A hard copy of each response was printed and a coded survey ID number was added to keep track of those returned. It is also possible to have the results go directly into a database, but that option was not used in this study.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Word computer software were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data respectively. SPSS was used to run several procedures such as Descriptive Statistics, Explore Cross Tabulation, and One-way ANOVA for the quantitative data for this study.

For the open-ended qualitative item, the Microsoft Word processor was used to content analyze the responses. The components of each response were disaggregated. Each component was entered into a Word table and read repeatedly until the topical categories emerged. These categories were used to group the responses into clusters. Responses unrelated to the question were not included in the analysis.

Results

The results are presented for each survey question. Before addressing the results, Table 1 presents a summary of the survey population and sample including the number of school systems, the number of superintendents with e-mail addresses, the number of e-mails actually delivered, and the number of surveys returned.

Table 1

Summary of Surveys Sent and Returned

Item	Number	Percent of Total
School Systems	128	100.0
Superintendents with e-mail addresses	123	96.1
E-mail actually delivered	119	93.0
Surveys Returned	34	28.6*

* Percent of e-mails delivered.

Five superintendents did not have e-mail addresses listed in the State Department of Education's website. Upon sending the e-mails, four were returned indicating that the e-mail addresses were not recognized by the system.

Table 2 provides an item-by-item summary of the frequencies and percentages of the responses. Of the responses representing 34 school systems, 1 (2.9%) had between 1,000 and 1,500 students, 5 (14.7%) had between 1,500 and 2,000, and 28 (82.4%) had at

Table 2
Frequency and Percentages of Responses to the Survey on Internet AUPs

Questions	Response Options	Responses No.	Responses %
1. Do students and teachers in your system have access to the Internet?	Yes	32	94.1
	No	2	5.9
2. If yes, what kind of Internet service does your system provide to teachers and students (select the best response)?	WWW	22	64.7
	E-mail	1	2.9
	Newsgroup	0	0.0
	Others	1	2.9
	All of them	10	29.4
3. What is your level of concern about students' proper use of the Internet?	1	1	2.9
	2	1	2.9
	3	7	20.6
	4	2	5.9
	5	23	67.6
4. Does your system have a systemwide Internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)?	Yes	31	91.2
	No	3	8.8
5. Has your system experienced any incidents in the past five years related to student use of the Internet?	Yes	18	52.9
	No	16	47.1
6. What was the nature of the incident your system experienced?	Security Vandalism	23	67.6
	Legal issues	1	2.9
	Others	3	8.8
		7	20.6
7. What is your degree of comfort concerning students' surfing the Internet without a binding AUP agreement?	1	8	23.5
	2	5	14.7
	3	4	11.8
	4	0	0.0
	5	17	50.0

Questions	Response Options	Responses No.	Responses %
8. What is the best way to make sure that students use the Internet properly in school other than having an AUP?	Strict supervision	7	20.6
	Strict discipline	1	2.9
	Blocking Software	7	20.6
	Other	2	5.9
	all	17	50.0
9. If you have an AUP in your system, how much do you believe that AUP can help your system stay out of problems that are caused by students using the Internet?	Greatly	12	35.3
	Somewhat	21	61.8
	Not at all	0	0.0
	No policy	1	2.9
10. If your system does not have an AUP at present, are you planning to adopt one?	Yes	32	94.1
	No	2	5.9
	Not sure	0	0.0
11. What is the approximate student population in your system?	Below 500	0	0.0
	500-1000	0	0.0
	1000-1500	1	2.9
	1500-2000	5	14.7
	Above 2000	28	82.4
12. Would you describe your system as: (select the best response)?	Urban	7	20.6
	Rural	18	52.9
	Suburban	9	26.5
13. Please describe the need or lack of need for an Internet acceptable use policy (AUP) in your school system. Space is provided below for your response.	Comments	22	64.7
	No comments	12	35.3

least 2,000 students. Seven (20.6%) of the superintendents (or their designees in every case) classified their systems as urban, 18 (52.9%) classified themselves as rural, and 9 (26.5%) classified themselves as suburban. Thirty-two (94.1%) systems provide teachers and students access to Internet, and 2 (5.9%) systems do not provide access to Internet.

Thirty-one superintendents (91.2%) claim to have AUPs in place while only 3 (8.8%) do not.

Ten (29.4%) of the systems provide access to the WWW, e-mail, or other undefined Internet access. Another 22 (64.7%) systems provide access to the WWW. Thus, one (2.9%) system provides access only to e-mail and another (2.9%) provides access to an undefined Internet service. Eighteen (52.9%) systems have experienced Internet use incidents in the past five years and 16 (47.1%) systems have not experienced any incidents. Among those that did experience incidents, 23 (67.6%) of systems experienced security problems, 1 (2.9%) experienced a vandalism problem, 3 (8.8 %) experienced legal issues, and 7 (20.6%) experienced other undefined incidents within the past five years.

Seventeen (50.0%) of the superintendents put themselves at the 5-level on the 1 to 5 comfort scale with "5" being "Very Comfortable" regarding students' surfing the Internet without a binding AUP agreement. Four (11.8%) superintendents put themselves at the "3" level, 5 (14.7%) put themselves at the "2" level, and only 8 (23.5%) systems put themselves at the "1" comfort level (Very Uncomfortable). Twelve (35.3%) superintendents believe that an AUP would greatly help their systems stay out of problems that may be caused by students using the Internet. Twenty-one (61.8%) superintendents believe that an AUP would help somewhat, and 3 (8.8%) systems have no AUP policy. Seven (20.6%) superintendents selected strict supervision as the best way to make sure students use the Internet properly other than having an AUP, 7 (20.6%) superintendents selected blocking software as the best way, 17 (50.0%) selected strict supervision and blocking software together as the best way, 2 (5.9%) chose other

undefined ways as best, and one (2.9%) superintendent selected strict discipline as the best way to guarantee students' proper surfing over the Internet in school other than having an AUP. The superintendents from two of the three systems that did not have an Internet AUP indicated that they did not plan to adopt one.

The level of concern about students' proper use of the Internet and the degree of comfort concerning students' surfing the Internet without a binding AUP was not related to the incidents systems have experienced in the past five years. From the box-and-whiskers plot (see Figure 1), it is clear that superintendents whose systems have experienced incidents regarding the proper use of the Internet and those who have not have similar levels of concern. However, when the comfort level of students surfing the Internet without a binding AUP agreement is related to whether systems have experienced incidents in the past five years, superintendents whose systems have experienced incidents are much less comfortable without a binding AUP (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Level of Concern Compared Over Incident Condition

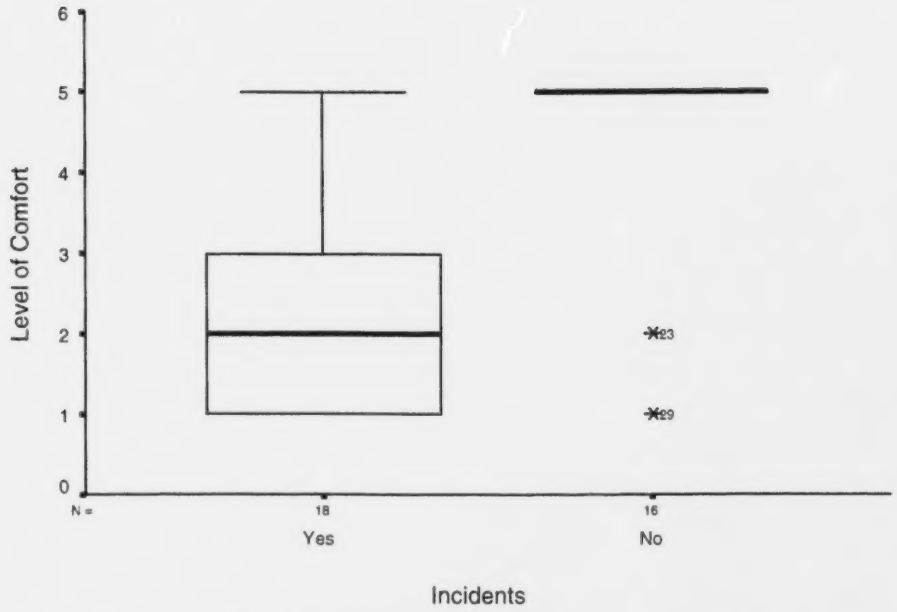

Figure 2. Level of Comfort without AUP over Incident Condition

Twenty-two (64.7%) of the superintendents provided comments (question 13) regarding their systems' need or lack of need for an Internet AUP. The responses were disaggregated and content analyzed; nonresponsive items were omitted from the responses. Sixteen categories emerged. The most common category to emerge was that "Blocking software will prevent unacceptable access to the WWW." The second-most response was that "AUP and filtering software should work together to protect students' proper Internet surfing." In fact, the top four categories provided alternatives to an AUP. All responses are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Categories Emerging from Open-ended Question

Category	Reponses	
	Number	Percent*
Blocking software will prevent unacceptable access to the WWW.	11	50
AUP and filtering software should work together to protect students' proper surfing of the Internet.	10	45
Strict supervision ensures students' using the Internet properly.	9	41
Filtering/tracking/monitoring software will assist with the enforcement of an AUP.	8	36
An AUP is a binding agreement.	7	31
An AUP should be available for the protection of the students, parents, administrators and faculty.	6	27
Strict supervision and software are the only things to rely on.	5	23
An AUP is the guiding principle of Internet use.	4	18
An AUP helps schools prevent the illegal and unethical use of Internet, and abuse of network resources.	3	13
An AUP helps students develop a sense of responsibility.	2	9
An AUP helps ensure students be honest, right, and lawful use of Internet.	2	9
Disciplinary actions should be incorporated into the AUP for students using the Internet.	2	9
For no other reason, an AUP is the way to educate students, parents, and teachers of self-responsibility for the usage of Internet.	2	9
An AUP adds a degree of control needed to direct students' use of Internet in productive channels.	1	4
Restrictive software is a poor solution; only an AUP can teach students the boundaries they have on the Internet.	1	4

*Percent of comments provided

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

Rheingold (1996) pointed out that in a free and democratic society, access to information is a fundamental right of citizenship. The Internet greatly adds value to education through the availability of vast information resources, and revolutionizes the process of education, so legal liabilities and personal responsibilities are foremost in taming this technology. Bringing technology into the classroom can be powerful, but it is not a frightening process. Along with all the wonderful resources available on the Internet, there are some things parents and teachers may not want their children and students to experience. To help students, parents, teachers, and administrators understand, engage in, and monitor wise use of the Internet, school systems should implement written AUPs for their schools which lay out under what conditions access to the Internet from a school computer is acceptable and when it is not.

The results of this survey suggest that many schools have already developed and/or are implementing AUPs that guide student, teacher, and staff use of technological resources. It should be noted that only 34 of 128 school superintendents responded. Therefore, these results should not be considered representative of all 128 systems. The specific emphasis is on limiting the liability of the school system and restricting access of students to those resources that are deemed "appropriate" for educational use. In Alabama, it seems that school systems rely on filtering systems, blocking software, strict supervision, and restricted access to monitor Internet use rather than depending on AUPs.

Carr (1998) pointed out that restricting access to resources brings up concerns of censorship. Sun and McLean recommended implementing an Internet AUP as the cornerstone of any Internet access policy. School districts need to address these concerns

by thinking carefully about what they want their students to have access to, how they want to restrict access (assuming they do), and what they will do when students gain access to materials deemed inappropriate. This survey clearly shows that there is a great need to reexamine AUPs that exist in most Alabama schools. School administrators need to make sure that their AUPs are not just printed paper without adequate implementation. AUPs should function as a binding agreement to help develop students' sense of responsibility, and to cultivate their self-responsibility when surfing the Internet. Actions such as installing filtering systems or blocking software and strict supervision will not succeed without the cooperation of students and their parents. An Internet AUP is the method by which school administrators can spell out the conditions under which students may use school computers so there will be no misunderstandings. Having parents also sign AUPs will make sure the communication does not stop with the students. In addition, many parents do not have the background to set Internet use restrictions on their children, so their involvement should also increase their parenting skills. School is the place where students are supposed to be educated as responsible citizens in society. We, as educators, need make our children responsible for their behavior when accessing the Internet. The development and implementation of an effective Internet AUP will provide a good foundation for this.

It is strongly recommended that each school system administrator decide for himself or herself what he or she feels is the appropriate use of technology. The results can be expressed in an AUP. There are many helpful resources available on the Internet that can guide the creation and implementation of an acceptable use policy for schools (see Appendix C for an example AUP and Appendix D for a list of useful Internet addresses for AUP information). In addition, school administrators may wish to consider the following issues when developing or modifying an acceptable use policy:

1. Get broad support for any acceptable use policy. Ideally, a school board should be directly involved in establishing any acceptable use policy adopted

by a school district. Since the issues around restrictions to resources are often controversial, school board members (who are elected officials) will be held accountable for whatever policy restrictions are implemented. Since popular support is key, AUPs should be drafted by teams involving board members, teachers, parents, and others in the community.

2. Deal with concerns of censorship by addressing specific situations to be covered in the acceptable use policy as well as defining what the outcome of such actions might be. Characterize possible risks as you develop or modify your AUP. Example risks might include the following:
    a. Students sending or receiving sexually explicit messages.
    b. Students accessing explicit content in an unsupervised situation.
    c. Restricting access to objectionable materials by means of software used by teachers, students, and staff.
    d. Student contact with people of doubtful identity or character.
    e. Objectionable student behavior.
    f. Destructive student behavior.
3. Reflect on the impact of the AUP on the school system and student learning. School administrators should always pay attention to the following questions:
    a. What restrictions might be infringements on individual free speech?
    b. Is monitoring school e-mail messages a violation of personal privacy?
    c. Who is ultimately responsible for student behavior in the school?
    d. What legal obligations do school systems have for the behavior of their students?

4. Any acceptable use policy should include the following "basic" items:
    a. A definition of the school district's stance on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate materials or resources.
    b. An outline of how students' access will be monitored and who will ultimately be responsible for student behavior.
    c. A description of what restrictions and responsibilities are placed on staff.
    d. An outline of what responsibilities are placed on students and parents.
5. One approach that school systems may use is to develop a student contract that is sent home to parents. This contract spells out the details of the responsibilities of students, parents, and the school system, and is signed by both student and parent. Included with this contract should be the AUP as well as a list of consequences associated with actions deemed inappropriate.
6. Take advantage of what others have learned about drafting and implementing acceptable use policies.
7. Visit Internet sites that have example or actual AUPs, talk with people (use e-mail or the telephone), get ideas from people who have already implemented these plans, and don't be afraid to get interested parties together to resolve issues or solve problems.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Survey of Acceptable Internet Use Policy

DIRECTIONS: We would appreciate your participate in a study of Internet acceptable use policies in Alabama school systems. An Internet acceptable use policy (AUP) is the binding agreement between an Internet user and a provider that specifies the acceptable use of the Internet. The study is being conducted by the Center for Educational Accountability at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Your answers to the following questions will be completely confidential and anonymous and will be helpful in determining the need of acceptable use policies for student's use of Internet in Alabama school systems. If you have questions regarding this study you may contact or e-mail me, James E. McLean, at (205)934-7598 or my assistant, Feng Sun at (205)934-6615. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore at 934-3789. Forwarding of your responses to this survey will be taken as evidence of your consent to participate in this study. Please choose the appropriate answer corresponding to each question by clicking the Drop-down menu below the each question. Thank you in advance for your assistance and participation.

Q1. Do students and teachers in your system have access to the Internet ?

Yes ▼

Q2. If yes, what kind of Internet service does your system provide to teachers and students (select the best response)?

World Wide Web ▼

Q3. What is your level of concern about students' proper use of the Internet?

None ◄——————► Great

1 2 3 4 5 5 ▼

Q4. Does your system have a systemwide Internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)?

Yes ▼

Q5. Has your system experienced any incidents in the past five years related to student use of the Internet?

Yes ▼

Q6. What was the nature of the incidents your system experienced?

Security problem

Q7. What is your degree of comfort concerning students' surfing the Internet without a binding AUP agreement?

Very uncomfortable ◄——————► **Very Comfortable**

1 2 3 4 5 5

Q8. What is the best way to make sure that students use the Internet properly in school other than having a AUP?

all

Q9. If you have an AUP in your system, how much do you believe that AUP can help your system stay out of problems which are caused by students using the Internet?

Greatly

Q10. If your system does not have an AUP at present, are you planning to adopt one?

Yes

Q11. What is the approximate student population in your system?

1500-2000

Q12. Would you describe your system as: (select the best response)?

Urban

Q13. Please describe the need or lack of need for an Internet acceptable use policy (AUP) in your school system. Space is provided below for your response.

Submit | Reset

Appendix B

To: superintendent
From: James E McLean <jmclean@uab.edu>
Subject: Survey on Internet User Policies
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

Dear Superintendent:

During the past two decades, computer and information technology have become a dominant world force, moving economies and creating knowledge at an unprecedented pace. Today, the Internet has become the focus. It is one of the most important technological revolutions, influencing many sectors of society including education. With the increased use of the Internet by schools, school administrations are struggling with appropriate policies.

In order to protect our kids and to avoid repeating past mistakes when introducing this technology into education, it is necessary for us as educators to take action to meet this challenge. An Internet acceptable use policy (AUP) is the binding agreement between an Internet user and a provider that specifies the acceptable use of the Internet.

We would appreciate it if you or your technology designee would take five minutes to complete a survey over the Internet on "Internet acceptable use policies in your school." The survey is available at:

http://www.ed.uab.edu/edt300sun/survey.htm

We would appreciate it if you or your designee could complete this survey by Monday, November 1, 1999. Thank you in advance for your assistance and participation. If you would like a copy of the results, please e-mail me.

Sincerely,

Jim

James E. McLean, Ph.D.
University Research Professor and Director Center for Educational Accountability
UAB School of Education, EB 233
901 13th Street South
Birmingham, AL 35294-1250
Voice: 205/934-8344 Fax: 205/975-5389
Web Site: www.dpo.uab.edu/~jmclean

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix B

To: McLean
From: James E McLean <jmclean@uab.edu>
Subject: Survey on Internet User Policies Follow-up
Cc:
Bcc: superintendent
X-Attachments:

Dear Superintendent:

A week ago, I sent you an e-mail survey regarding an Internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) in your system. We have received many responses and, if you are one of those who responded, thank you very much. If you have not been able to respond yet, we would appreciate your taking five minutes to respond to the 13 questions. If you would prefer someone else in your system to respond, please forward this e-mail to him or her. In any case, the survey is located on the Internet at:

http://www.ed.uab.edu/edt300sun/survey.htm

We would appreciate it if you or your designee could complete this survey by Friday, November 5, 1999. It will take no longer than five minutes and is completely anonymous. Thank you in advance for your assistance and participation. If you would like a copy of the results, please e-mail me.

Sincerely,

Jim

James E. McLean, Ph.D.
University Research Professor and Director Center for Educational Accountability
UAB School of Education, EB 233
901 13th Street South
Birmingham, AL 35294-1250
Voice: 205/934-8344 Fax: 205/975-5389
Web Site: www.dpo.uab.edu/~jmclean

Appendix C

The following template is based on the AUP template available from ftp site ftp.classroom.net/wentworth/Classroom-Connect/aup-faq.txt. Classroom Connect makes it available so that it may be used to create your own AUP.

<YOUR> School District
Internet Acceptable Use Agreement

(Please read this document carefully before signing.)

Internet access is now available to students and teachers in the <YOUR> School District. We are very pleased to bring this access to <YOUR> School District and believe the Internet offers vast, diverse, and unique resources to both students and teachers. Our goal in providing this service to teachers and students is to promote educational excellence in schools by facilitating resource sharing, innovation, and communication.

The Internet is an electronic highway connecting thousands of computers all over the world and millions of individual subscribers. Students and teachers have access to:

1. Electronic mail (e-mail) communication with people all over the world.
2. Information and news from NASA as well as the opportunity to correspond with the scientists at NASA and other research institutions.
3. Public domain software and graphics of all types for school use.
4. Discussion groups on a plethora of topics ranging from Chinese culture to the environment to music to politics
5. Access to many University Library Catalogs, the Library of Congress, and ERIC, a large collection of relevant information to educators and students.
6. Graphical access to the World Wide Web, the newest and most exciting access tool on the Internet.

With access to computers and people all over the world also comes the availability of material that may not be considered to be of educational value in the context of the school setting. <YOUR> School District has taken precautions to restrict access to controversial materials. However, on a global network it is impossible to control all materials and an industrious user may discover controversial information. We (<YOUR> School District) firmly believe that the valuable information and interaction available on this worldwide network far out weighs the possibility that users may procure material that is not consistent with the educational goals of the District.

Internet access is coordinated through a complex association of government agencies, and regional and state networks. In addition, the smooth operation of the network relies upon the proper conduct of the end users who must adhere to strict

guidelines. These guidelines are provided here so that you are aware of the responsibilities you are about to acquire. In general this requires efficient, ethical and legal utilization of the network resources. If an <YOUR> School District user violates any of these provisions, his or her account will be terminated and future access could possibly be denied.

The signature(s) at the end of this document is (are) legally binding and indicates the party (parties) who signed has (have) read the terms and conditions carefully and understand(s) their significance.

Internet--Terms and Conditions of Use

1) Acceptable Use - The purpose of the backbone networks making up the Internet is to support research and education in and among academic institutions by providing access to unique resources and the opportunity for collaborative work. The use of your account must be in support of education and research and consistent with the educational objectives of the <YOUR> School District. Use of other organizations' network or computing resources must comply with the rules appropriate for that network. Transmission of any material in violation of any national or state regulation is prohibited.

2) Privileges - The use of the Internet is a privilege, not a right, and inappropriate use will result in a cancellation of those privileges. (Each student or teacher who receives an account will be part of a discussion with a <YOUR> School District staff member pertaining to the proper use of the network.) The system administrators will deem what is inappropriate use and their decision is final. Also, the system administrators may close an account at any time as required. The administration, faculty, and staff of <YOUR> School District may request the system administrator to deny, revoke, or suspend specific user accounts.

3) Network Etiquette - You are expected to abide by the generally accepted rules of network etiquette. These include (but are not limited to) the following:

a. Be polite. Do not get abusive in your messages to others.
b. Use appropriate language. Do not swear, use vulgarities or any other inappropriate language.
c. Illegal activities are strictly forbidden.
d. Do not reveal your personal address or phone numbers of students or colleagues.
e. Note that electronic mail (e-mail) is not guaranteed to be private. People who operate the system do have access to all mail. Messages relating to or in support of illegal activities may be reported to the authorities.
f. Do not use the network in such a way that you would disrupt the use of the network by other users.
g. All communications and information accessible via the network should be assumed to be private property.

4) <YOUR> School District makes no warranties of any kind, whether expressed or implied, for the service it is providing. <YOUR> School District will not be responsible for any damages you suffer. This includes loss of data resulting from delays, nondeliveries, misdeliveries, or service interruptions caused by its own negligence or your errors or omissions. Use of any information obtained via the Internet is at your own risk. <YOUR> School District specifically denies any responsibility for the accuracy or quality of information obtained through its services.

5) Security - Security on any computer system is a high priority, especially when the system involves many users. If you feel you can identify a security problem on the Internet, you must notify a system administrator or your <YOUR> District Internet Coordinator. Do not demonstrate the problem to other users. Do not use another individual's account without written permission from that individual. Attempts to logon to the Internet as a system administrator will result in cancellation of user privileges. Any user identified as a security risk or having a history of problems with other computer systems may be denied access to the Internet.

6) Vandalism - Vandalism will result in cancellation of privileges. Vandalism is defined as any malicious attempt to harm or destroy data of another user, Internet, or any of the above listed agencies or other networks that are connected to any of the Internet backbones. This includes, but is not limited to, the uploading or creation of computer viruses.

School District Internet Use Agreement

I understand and will abide by the above Internet Use Agreement. I further understand that any violation of the regulations above is unethical and may constitute a criminal offense. Should I commit any violation, my access privileges may be revoked, and school disciplinary action, and/or appropriate legal action may be taken.

User's Full Name: _____

User Signature: _____

Date: _____

PARENT OR GUARDIAN

As the parent or guardian of this student, I have read the Internet Use Agreement. I understand that this access is designed for educational purposes. <YOUR> School District has taken precautions to eliminate controversial material. However, I also recognize it is impossible for School District to restrict access to all controversial materials and I will not hold them responsible for materials acquired on the network. Further, I accept full responsibility for supervision if and when my child's use is not in a school setting. I hereby give permission to issue an account for my child and certify that the information contained on this form is correct.

Parent or Guardian's Name (please print): _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature: _____

SPONSORING TEACHER

(Must be signed if the applicant is a student)

I have read the Internet Use Agreement and agree to promote this agreement with the student. Because the student may use the network for individual work or in the context of another class, I cannot be held responsible for the student use of the network. As the sponsoring teacher I do agree to instruct the student on acceptable use of the network and proper network etiquette.

Teacher's Name (please print): _____

Teacher's Signature: _____

Appendix C

Following is an example of AUP from the Web. It is available from http://classroom.net.edu/aup/nnhs.htm

TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR USE OF INTERNET

Please read the following carefully before signing this document. This is a legally binding document.

Internet access is now available to students and teachers in the Brevard County School District. The access is being offered as part of a collaborative research project involving Name Name High School (NNHS), Florida Institute of Technology, and the U.S. Department of Education. We are very pleased to bring this access to Brevard County and believe the Internet offers vast, diverse and unique resources to both students and teachers. Our goal in providing this service to teachers and students is to promote educational excellence in the Brevard County Schools by facilitating resource sharing, innovation and communication.

The Internet is an electronic highway connecting thousands of computers all over the world and millions of individual subscribers. Students and teachers have access to:

1. electronic mail communication with people all over the world.
2. information and news from NASA as well as the opportunity to correspond with the scientists at NASA and other research institutions.
3. public domain and shareware of all types.
4. discussion groups on a plethora of topics ranging from culture to the environment to music to politics.
5. access to many University Library Catalogs, the Library of Congress, CARL and ERIC.

With access to computers and people all over the world also comes the availability of material that may not be considered to be of educational value in the context of the school setting. (NNHS), and Florida Institute of Technology have taken available precautions to restrict access to controversial materials. However, on a global network it is impossible to control all materials and an industrious user may discover controversial information. We ((NNHS), and Florida Institute of Technology) firmly believe that the valuable information and interaction available on this worldwide network far outweighs the possibility that users may procure material that is not consistent with the educational goals of this Project.

Internet access is coordinated through a complex association of government agencies, and regional and state networks. In addition, the smooth operation of the network relies upon the proper conduct of the end users who must adhere to strict guidelines. These guidelines are provided here so that you are aware of the responsibilities you are about to aquire. In general this requires efficient, ethical and

legal utilization of the network resources. If a (NNHS) user violates any of these provisions, his or her account will be terminated and future access could possibly be denied. The signature(s) at the end of this document is (are) legally binding and indicates the party (parties) who signed has (have) read the terms and conditions carefully and understand(s) their significance.

Internet - Terms and Conditions

1) Acceptable Use - The purpose of NSFNET, which is the backbone network to the Internet, is to support research and education in and among academic institutions in the U.S. by providing access to unique resources and the opportunity for collaborative work. The use of your account must be in support of education and research and consistent with the educational objectives of the Brevard County School District. Use of other organization's network or computing resources must comply with the rules appropriate for that network. Transmission of any material in violation of any US or state regulation is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to: copyrighted material, threatening or obscene material, or material protected by trade secret. Use for commercial activities by for-proFlorida Institute of Technology institutions is generally not acceptable. Use for product advertisement or political lobbying is also prohibited.

2) Privileges - The use of Internet is a privilege, not a right, and inappropriate use will result in a cancellation of those privileges. (Each student who receives an account will be part of a discussion with a (NNHS) faculty member pertaining to the proper use of the network.) The system administrators will deem what is inappropriate use and their decision is final. Also, the system administrators may close an account at any time as required. The administration, faculty, and staff of (NNHS) may request the system administrator to deny, revoke, or suspend specific user accounts.

3) Netiquette - You are expected to abide by the generally accepted rules of network etiquette. These include (but are not limited to) the following:

a. Be polite. Do not get abusive in your messages to others.
b. Use appropriate language. Do not swear, use vulgarities or any other inappropriate language. Illegal activities are strictly forbidden.
c. Do not reveal your personal address or phone numbers of students or colleagues.
d. Note that electronic mail (e-mail) is not guaranteed to be private. People who operate the system do have access to all mail. Messages relating to or in support of illegal activities may be reported to the authorities.
e. Do not use the network in such a way that you would disrupt the use of the network by other users.
f. All communications and information accessible via the network should be assumed to be private property.

4) (NNHS), and Florida Institute of Technology make no warranties of any kind, whether expressed or implied, for the service it is providing. (NNHS), and Florida

Institute of Technology will not be responsible for any damages you suffer. This include loss of data resulting from delays, nondeliveries, misdeliveries, or service interruptions caused by it's own negligence or your errors or omissions. Use of any information obtained via (NNHS), or Florida Institute of Technology is at your own risk. (NNHS), and Florida Institute of Technology specifically deny any responsibility for the accuracy or quality of information obtained through its services.

5) Security - Security on any computer system is a high priority, especially when the system involves many users. If you feel you can identify a security problem on Internet, you must notify a system administrator or e-mail barry@sci-ed.Florida Institute of Technology.edu. Do not demonstrate the problem to other users. Do not use another individual's account without written permission from that individual. Attempts to login to Internet as a system administrator will result in cancellation of user privileges. Any user identified as a security risk or having a history of problems with other computer systems may be denied access to Internet.

6) Vandalism - Vandalism will result in cancellation of privileges. Vandalism is defined as any malicious attempt to harm or destroy data of another user, Internet, or any of the above listed agencies or other networks that are connected to the NSFNET Internet backbone. This includes, but not limited to, the uploading or creation of computer viruses.

7) Updating Your User Information - Internet may occasionally require new registration and account information from you to continue the service. You must notify Internet of any changes in your account information(address, etc). Currently, there are no user fees for this service.

8) Exception of Terms and Condition - All terms and conditions as stated in this document are applicable to the Brevard County School District, the Florida Institute of Technology, in addition to NSFNET. These terms and conditions reflect the entire agreement of the parties and supersede all prior oral or written agreements and understandings of the parties. These terms and conditions shall be governed and interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of Florida, and the United States of America.

I understand and will abide by the above Terms and Conditions for Internet. I further understand that any violation of the regulations above is unethical and may constitute a criminal offense. Should I commit any violation, my access privileges may be revoked, school disciplinary action may be taken and/or appropriate legal action.

User Signature:_____ Date: ___/ ___/ _____

PARENT OR GUARDIAN (If you are under the age of 18 a parent or guardian must also read and sign this agreement.)

As the parent or guardian of this student I have read the Terms and Conditions for Internet access. I understand that this access is designed for educational purposes and (NNHS), and Florida Institute of Technology has taken available precautions to eliminate controversial material. However, I also recognize it is impossible for (NNHS), and Florida Institute of Technology to restrict access to all controversial materials and I will not hold them responsible for materials acquired on the network. Further, I accept full responsibility for supervision if and when my child's use is not in a school setting. I hereby give permission to issue an account for my child and certify that the information contained on this form is correct.

Parent or Guardian (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Useful Internet URLs concerning the writing of AUP.

1. http://falcon.jmu.edu/schoollibrary/netpolicy.htm
   This site gives you a lot of information about writing the AUP and some useful sources to access existing AUPs over the Internet.

2. http://www.sabine.k12.la.us/vrschool/AUP.htm
   This site periodically updates the information about the AUPs in some of the biggest school systems.

3. http://www.io.com/~kinnaman/aupessay.html
   This essay describes and critiques educational Acceptable Use Policies on the Internet in June 1995. The essay was first released by the Global Network Navigator's (GNN's) Education Center in Summer 1995.

4. http://www.oise.on.ca/~mfung/issue.html
   With Internet access becoming more common in schools, most teachers and administrators want a set of acceptable use policies (AUP) for the guidance of their students.

5. http://www.sol.com.sg/HyperNews/get/TeachTalk/2.html
   If any school is implementing or introducing Internet access to their student population, this site is strongly recommended. You may find some basic information about an Internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

6. http://www.etc.sccoe.k12.ca.us/CalTip/aups.html
   This is a good site for students, parents and teachers to see what the AUP will do for them.